



Ignoring the risk of a devastating landslide during the ongoing monsoon, poor people live in such shabby houses on hillslopes in Islampur area of Rangamati Sadar upazila. Right, members of a family pose in front of their house built on loose earth at a barren hilltop in the area.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

Risky living at hillslopes

Despite frequent landslide incidents authorities concerned yet to take any affective measures

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

Jhinuk Begum, a mother of three children, is in a nail-biting situation as she fears that the little tin-shed hut she lives in at the foot of a hill in Bandarban might go beneath mud anytime with landslides being a frequent occurrence in the area lately.

Two adjacent huts were buried under mud when a chunk of soil fell on them just two days ago. Jhinuk, who earns her livelihood by working as a domestic help, told this correspondent.

Jhinuk is a resident of Islampur, a neighbourhood where some 500 families live. The area is preferred by low-income people for low rentals.

Lungi Para, Banorupa Para, New Gulshan, Kalaghata, Kashem Para, Lemu Jiri, and Islampur are among areas most vulnerable to landslides. Every year, local administration

calls on the residents to move to safe places during monsoon but they hardly pay heed.

"This is because there is no place to go," said Jhinuk. "Despite being aware of the risks, me and my family are yet to make any decision. Because where do we go now?"

Similar statement came from Kulsum Akhter of Banorupa Para.

One Menpong Mro, 25, of Cramadi Para of Bandarban Sadar upazila, died when a chunk of soil fell on him while he was working on his Jhum field on July 13.

The next day, in Bandarban's Lama upazila, Nurjahan Begum, 70, was killed when a chunk of mud from a hill collapsed on her house in Madhujiri area.

Her son and his wife were also injured and admitted to Lama Upazila Health Complex. Incessant raining triggered the landslide.

In 2018, landslides killed 11 people in Rangamati and seven people in Bandarban.

The numbers were much higher the previous year when massive landslides snatched lives of about 117 people in both the districts. Rangamati had the highest number of casualties at 110, including 33 women and 35 children.

Bandarban Sadar Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mohammad Noman Hossain said, "We have urged the residents several times to evacuate the hills but they didn't do so."

When asked about what could be a sustainable solution to this menace hitting the area every monsoon, he said, "A few weeks ago, we chalked out plans to build two shelter houses. The DC office has already sent the proposal to the Prime Minister's Office."

Regarding the project, Shafiul Alam, additional deputy commissioner (revenue) of the district, said, "We started the work but could not continue it because of the usual

complicacies plaguing the hills."

"Those who have been living on the hills for ages are unwilling to leave their ancestral homes."

However, Jumlian Amnai, president of Parbatya Chattogram Forest and Land Rights Protection Movement (Bandarban chapter), said the vulnerable ones are mostly Bengali settlers who do not know the techniques to survive on hills.

"The settlers cut hills indiscriminately whereas the indigenous people build houses on higher surfaces using bamboos and special techniques to stay safe from landslide likely to occur in monsoon," he said.

Jumlian observed that building shelter homes only might not be the ultimate solution. "Why would these people leave their homes and start living at a remote place if not given guarantee of food and work," said the activist.

Indiscriminate hill cutting and construction of rickety huts at the foothills are two major factors that put about 35,000 people under risks of landslide during monsoon, according to the local administration.

During a visit to the area a few weeks ago, this correspondent found poor people living in the rickety huts, oblivious to the risks of landslide.

"There are people with political links who grabbed hills and built shanties there to rent them out to the low-income people," said Bandarban Sadar UNO Noman Hossain.

"The district administration has not taken any visible step to prevent the influential locals from building houses by cutting hills. It has not taken any action against the land grabbers," said an official of Bandarban DC office, wishing not to be named.

RAPE OF TWO SCHOOLGIRLS Five get life term

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A court here yesterday sentenced five people to life term imprisonment in connection with a case filed for raping two schoolgirls in 2016.

The convicts, Ujjal Khan, 25, Sukur Ali, 26, Miraj Sheikh, 25, Elias Bepary, 20, and Shafi Mollah, 25, of Char Salepur village in Charbhadransan upazila, were tried in absentia, Public Prosecutor (PP) Shapon Paul said.

Judge Mohammad Alamgir Kabir of Faridpur Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal also fined the convicts Tk 1 lakh each. In default, they are to suffer three years more in jail, the PP added.

According to the prosecution, the convicts picked up the two schoolgirls, then Class IX students at a local high school, while they were returning home from a local market and took them to a corn field nearby on April 14, 2016.

The culprits raped the two girls there and videoed the heinous act.

They later phoned the victims' family members and demanded Tk 1 lakh as ransom, otherwise, threatened that they would spread the videos through the internet.

Later, failing to get the ransom money the convicts uploaded the videos in the internet.

On June 11, 2016, father of one of the victims filed a case with Faridpur Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal accusing the five.

After investigation, Ram Prasad Bhokta, the then officer in charge of Charbhadransan Police Station, submitted the charge sheet against the five on October 22 the same year.

Local fishes depleting in Lalmonirhat

Shrinking of waterbodies, massive cultivation of hybrid fish blamed for the situation

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Local varieties of fishes are facing extinction amid disappearance of waterbodies and spread of fast growing hybrid fish cultivation in Lalmonirhat.

Now the popular indigenous varieties are selling at high rates due to their poor supply and high demand in the local markets.

Only a few years ago, Lalmonirhat people could taste a variety of indigenous fishes like sheatfish, carp anabas, catfish, striped snakehead, chital, rui, barbel, kakila, soborna, giant snakehead, flatfish, bele, meni, tengra, and many other species, said locals.

Fish traders in the district's biggest fish market, Goshala Bazar in Lalmonirhat town, said now local fishes are selling for Tk 500 to Tk 1500 a kg while those sold for Tk 300 Tk 500 only two years ago.

Indigenous fishes are gradually going beyond the purchasing capacity of the common people, they said.

"I purchased half a kg of tengra fish for Tk 600 from the local market on Wednesday. The fish is becoming rare here," said Mosharaf Hossain, 55, a businessman at Tumolpara in the town.

Nurnabi Islam, 46, a jewellery shop



Such indigenous fishes, dear to people for their taste, are now sold for high prices as the species are not that available now-a-days. The photo was taken from Goshala Bazar in Lalmonirhat town on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

owner at Baniapatti in the town, said he purchased two kg of shing fish for Tk 1900 on Wednesday morning, after looking for it for around a month.

"I often get advance payment from people for delivering local varieties of fish. Only four to five percent of fishes in this market is of indigenous species while the

rest are chalani (cultivated hybrid varieties) fishes," said Prodip Kumar Das, 35, a fish trader at Goshala Bazar.

Fisherman Suresh Chandra Das, 75, at Teesta River basin village Daspara of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila said now most of the government-owned waterbodies are rented out to lessees who cultivate chalani fishes for high profit while many natural waterbodies have dried up, causing scarcity of local fish.

Mozahar Ali, 58, of Kakina village of Kaliganj upazila, said he has five ponds covering six acres of land in the village where he cultivates fast growing hybrid varieties of fish and earn good profit every year.

"I don't cultivate local fishes as their growth is slow. Besides, it is no longer easy to find their fry," he said

"In the district, there were 5,800 free waterbodies covering 11,900 hectares of land only a decade ago. But the number decreased to 3,750 with 6,100 hectares of land five years ago," said Faruqul Islam, district fisheries officer in Lalmonirhat.

"Climate change and use of toxic insecticides are the major reasons behind the gradual decline of indigenous fishes, he said.



Around 12 maunds of sweets worth nearly Tk 1.44 lakh were destroyed on Saturday night by a mobile court in Mahendranagar area of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. The sweets, meant to be sold later during Eid holidays, were found preserved illegally at Total Cold Storage. The court led by Executive Magistrate and Sadar Upazila Assistant Commissioner (Land) GR Sarwar also fined the storage manager Tk 40 thousand.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

50 injured in villagers' clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

At least 50 people were injured in a clash between two groups of villagers in Shailakupa upazila yesterday allegedly over establishing supremacy in the locality.

Twenty houses, belonging to members of both the groups, were also vandalised during the clash.

Of the injured, 44 were admitted to Shailakupa Upazila Health Complex while six others shifted to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

Quoting locals, police said there had been a longstanding rivalry between Monoharpur union parishad (UP) member Israil Hossain and Motiar Rahman of Paikpara village over establishing supremacy in the area.

As a sequel to the conflict, both the groups, equipped with lethal weapons, locked in a fierce clash yesterday morning that left 50 people from both sides injured, Officer in Charge of Shailakupa Police Station Bazlur Rahman said.

2 traders found dead

STAR COUNTRY DESK

Two traders were found dead in Jamalpur and Khulna yesterday.

Our Jamalpur Correspondent reports: A man, who went missing on Friday, was found dead in the Brahmaputra river near Defla bridge in Melandah upazila of the district yesterday.

The deceased, Hasen Ali, 52, son of late Yajuddin of Sabhukora village in Islampur upazila, was a pottery trader. Quoting the deceased's family members, Officer in Charge of Islampur (OC) Police Station Abdullah Al Mamun said Hasen went out of his house on Friday evening and remained missing since then.

Locals spotted Hasen's beheaded body floating in the Brahmaputra river yesterday morning and informed the police.

On information, Melandah police recovered the beheaded body from the river around 11:00am and later recovered his severed head from a branch river of the Brahmaputra at Uttar Dariabad village in Islampur upazila around 2:00pm, OC Mamun said, adding that they were trying to find the reason behind the killing and arrest the culprits involved in the murder.

Away in Khulna, police recovered the body of owner of a fish enclosure in Dumuria upazila yesterday, reports our correspondent.

The deceased, Sagir Uddin Hawlader, 35, son of Habib Hawlader, was a resident of Kailashganj village in Dacope upazila of the district.

Officer in Charge of Dumuria Police Station Aminul Islam said locals found Sagir's body in a room of his fish enclosure at Ghona Madardanga village early yesterday and informed police, who recovered the body and sent it to Khulna Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Local resident Shamim said Sagir took lease of the fish enclosure and had been living in the locality for the last eight years.

TRAWLER CAPSIZE

16 fishermen missing in Bay

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

At least 16 fishermen went missing and another rescued from the Bay in Barguna's Pathorghata upazila as tides, triggered by rough weather, hit their fishing trawler early Sunday.

One of the nearby fishing boats FB Arif rescued Mahmud, 35, son of Oar Ali of Noakhali, and brought him to Pathorghata, Barguna Trawler Owners' Association President Golam Mostafa said.

Quoting the rescued fisherman, Mostafa said a fishing trawler, owned by Anwar Hossain of Tafalbaria village in the upazila, with 17 fishermen on board, went in the Bay for fishing a few days ago.

Around 3:00am, while they were fishing in Purbo Lalboya area, about 120 kilometre from the upazila headquarters, their trawler capsized due to a rough weather.